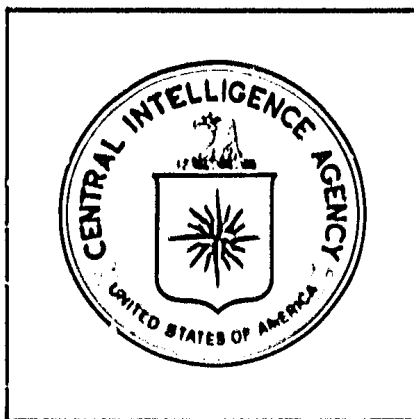


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SOVIET UNION - EASTERN EUROPE

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the USSR - Eastern Europe Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Soviets To Give a Stern
Reply to Egyptians

During his visit to Egypt next week Foreign Minister Gromyko will take a tough line in response to President Sadat's recent criticism of the USSR.

Y. D. Pyrlin, deputy chief of the Foreign Ministry's Near East Division, told a US embassy officer yesterday that, in his recent *Le Monde* interview, Sadat had raised "many difficult" matters and had not helped Soviet-Egyptian relations. A Soviet official in Egypt has also been saying that Gromyko will speak strongly to Sadat about bilateral matters and the Geneva conference.

Pyrlin added that Gromyko would sign scientific, consular, and economic planning agreements while in Cairo. These accords were negotiated over the past few months and had been intended for signature by Brezhnev during his scheduled visit to the Middle East. If Gromyko does the honors, it would be a further indication that the party chief's trip has been indefinitely shelved.

Pyrlin said that Gromyko would not discuss debt rescheduling while in Cairo, but that this topic would be discussed during regular Soviet-Egyptian economic discussions in Moscow next month. As pressures on Egypt's foreign currency position have mounted, Sadat has grown more critical of Moscow's failure to postpone the payments on past arms purchases. Moscow undoubtedly sees the debt issue--along with arms supplies--as a lever on the Egyptians.

The Soviet official was noncommittal about Secretary Kissinger's projected Middle East trip. He gave the predictable plug for the Geneva conference, but implied that going to Geneva did not rule out other kinds of negotiations.

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Pyrilin predicted that Gromyko's discussions in Syria would be routine although a health agreement would be signed. The Soviets may seek to fan Syrian suspicions of Egyptian intentions in the disengagement negotiations and also bolster Damascus' support for Geneva. One Soviet official in Cairo recently indicated that after King Faysal's visit, Moscow is less sure of Asad's commitment to move the negotiations to Geneva.

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Soviet Leaders Reiterate Moscow's
Commitment to Detente

Three Politburo members in speeches on Tuesday reiterated Moscow's commitment to detente, adding authority to a recent spate of Soviet press items on the continued importance of US-Soviet ties.

Their emphasis on the continuity of Soviet foreign policy is probably intended to reassure foreign and domestic audiences in light of the US-Soviet trade set-back and Brezhnev's extended absence from public life. It does not necessarily mean that foreign policy issues are not under debate within the leadership, nor does it shed much light on Brezhnev's status.

Party secretary Ponomarev, addressing an armed forces conference of ideological workers in Moscow, said that detente must be irreversible. He emphasized the importance of the Vladivostok accords to a long-term US-Soviet arms limitation agreement.

In terms reminiscent of his December speech to European Communists in Budapest, Ponomarev described detente as offering new opportunities for socialism. He went on to analyze the economic crisis of the West as a mixed blessing for the socialist camp, warning--as he had in Hungary--of the danger of fascist reaction.

Defense Minister Grechko also had praise for the Soviet "peace program," but characteristically attributed the successes of detente to the changing "correlation of forces." He also cautioned that the danger of war remains a "grim reality" and that the arms race is accelerating, not slowing down.

Trade union leader Shelepin, meanwhile, speaking in East Berlin to the World Federation of Trade Unions,

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strongly defended Soviet policy against unnamed critics, perhaps including their hard-line East German hosts, who argue that capitalism has been the main beneficiary of detente. He argued that East-West economic cooperation aids the cause of peace, assists workers in troubled capitalist economies, and strengthens the Soviet economy.

Both Shelepin and Ponomarev referred directly to the Soviet rejection of US trade legislation. Shelepin denounced attempts at capitalist interference in Soviet internal affairs. Ponomarev, picking up a current Soviet propaganda theme, expressed satisfaction that the Soviet position on the trade act had met with understanding by an "influential part" of US society. Ponomarev, following the line of the Soviet press, also called attention to recent statements by the President and Secretary Kissinger affirming continued US interest in strengthening detente.

Soviet commentary pegged to the opening of the strategic arms limitation talks has taken a positive view on the prospects for the negotiations. The media have for the first time explicitly stated that progress in Geneva is even more important because of the developments on the trade front. [REDACTED]

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SECRETSoviets on the Portuguese Situation

Recent Soviet media coverage reflects Moscow's desire not to get out in front of the Portuguese Communist Party in the rapidly developing situation in Portugal. A Soviet international broadcast on January 29 was apparently Moscow's first commentary since the atmosphere began to heat up again in Lisbon over the unified trade union issue. It strongly endorses the Portuguese party's position on trade union unity and echoes the call of party leader Cunhal for unity within the ruling coalition. The Portuguese Socialist Party is criticized for opposing the Communists, but the door is left open for Communist and Socialist cooperation. The commentary issued another routine warning of danger from the right, and the close relations between the "democratic forces" and the Armed Forces Movement were once again called the most important factor in the Portuguese equation.

Despite its concern over a rightist reaction, Moscow is clearly pleased with the way the Portuguese situation is developing. Soviet party secretary Ponomarev said in a speech at the Soviet armed forces ideological conference earlier this week that events in Portugal are evidence of the gains that progressive forces can make under conditions of detente.

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SECRETEast German-Soviet Foreign Policy Talks

East Germany's new Foreign Minister, Oskar Fischer, and Politburo member Hermann Axen--the party's foreign affairs expert--were summoned to Moscow earlier this week for an apparently wide-ranging foreign policy review. The communique on the visit produced the usual claims of "full unity of views," but Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko's description of the talks as "frank," and "businesslike" suggests that some differences--probably minor--did emerge.

Moscow may be trying to line up its loyalist allies in connection with a reported Soviet initiative to be taken at the European security talks. A well-connected Polish journalist on January 29 explained Polish Foreign Minister Olszowski's one-day trip to Moscow last week by saying the Soviets wanted to push for a successful conclusion of the security talks before the 30th anniversary of the surrender of Nazi Germany. The journalist further claimed that Moscow will offer three unspecified concessions within the next few weeks in order to facilitate progress at the talks and that the Soviets will be briefing all Warsaw Pact foreign ministers--one by one--on tactics.

Discussions of Berlin and East - West German questions probably produced the most disagreement in the Fischer-Gromyko sessions. In addition to Pankow's simmering "German" citizenship controversy with Bonn [redacted] the talks probably covered the apparently stiffer Soviet attitude toward West German ties with West Berlin and the impact of its new position on inter-German negotiations. Plans for celebrating the anniversaries of the end of World War II and the founding of the Warsaw Pact, and for the European Communist Conference that is to be held in East Berlin probably were also discussed.

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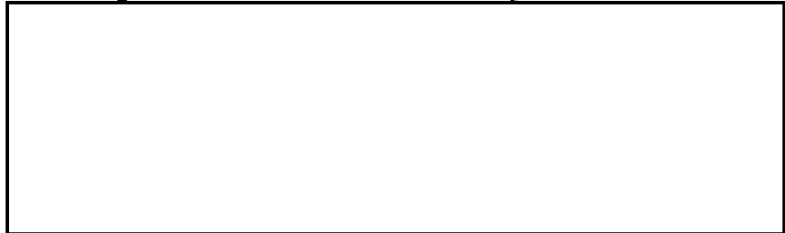
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The Soviet press gave Fischer more press play than his senior colleague Axen. The US embassy in Moscow reads this as indicating a Soviet desire to play down the party aspects of the visit. Fischer is well known to the Soviets, having run the Foreign Ministry for most of last year when illness incapacitated his predecessor, Otto Winzer. Fischer was last in Moscow four months ago to confer with Foreign Minister Gromyko before attending the UN General Assembly.

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SECRETImminent Central Committee Plenum Unlikely

The sudden return to Moscow of M. T. Yefremov, Soviet ambassador to East Germany, earlier this week has led to speculation that a Central Committee plenum is on the agenda. Yefremov, a full member of the Central Committee, would be expected to attend. Activities of other important political figures, however, do not support this theory.

Two Politburo members, for example, are currently traveling outside the Soviet Union. Candidate member Rashidov is in India as the head of a Soviet delegation to a congress of the Indian Communist Party. Aleksandr Shelepin, a full member of the Politburo, went to East Germany earlier in the week and arrived yesterday in West Germany for talks with trade union leaders. On Saturday, Foreign Minister Gromyko also a full member of the Politburo, will begin a swing through the Middle East that is expected to include stops in Damascus, Cairo, and possibly Baghdad. It is unlikely that Rashidov, Shelepin, and Gromyko would leave the country if a plenum had been scheduled for the near future.

There has been no official explanation for Yefremov's return to Moscow. The Soviet embassy in Berlin simply noted that he returned on "urgent business," but would be back in Berlin in two or three days. A possible explanation is that Yefremov was called back to brief Soviet leaders on East German affairs prior to the arrival of new Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer and party secretary for international relations Herman Axen. On Monday Foreign Minister Gromyko, Secretary Katushev, and Ambassador Yefremov met with the East German to discuss "international issues of mutual interest." The developing flap between the two Germanies over the question of East German citizenship may be one of the topics discussed.

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